Unit .15

Session .02

God Receives the People's Repentance

Scripture

2 Chronicles 34:1-11,14-15,18-21

1 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. **2** He did what was right in the LORD's sight and walked in the ways of his ancestor David; he did not turn aside to the right or the left. **3** In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still a youth, Josiah began to seek the God of his ancestor David, and in the twelfth year he began to cleanse Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherah poles, the carved images, and the cast images. **4** Then in his presence the altars of the Baals were torn down, and he chopped down the shrines that were above them. He shattered the Asherah poles, the carved images, and the cast images, crushed them to dust, and scattered them over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. **5** He burned the bones of the priests on their altars. So he cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. **6** He did the same in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali and on their surrounding mountain shrines. **7** He tore down the altars, and he smashed the Asherah poles and the carved images to powder. He chopped down all the shrines throughout the land of Israel and returned to Jerusalem. **8** In the eighteenth year of his reign, in order to cleanse the land and the temple, Josiah sent Shaphan son of Azaliah, along with Maaseiah the governor of the city and the court historian Joah son of Joahaz, to repair the temple of the LORD his God. **9** So they went to the high priest Hilkiah and gave him the silver brought into God's temple. The Levites and the doorkeepers had collected it from Manasseh, Ephraim, and from the entire remnant of Israel, and from all Judah, Benjamin, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. **10** They gave it to those doing the work—those who oversaw the LORD's temple. They gave it to the workmen who were working in the LORD's temple, to repair and restore the temple; **11** they gave it to the carpenters and builders and also used it to buy quarried stone and timbers—for joining and making beams—for the buildings that Judah's kings had destroyed ... **14** When they brought out the silver that had been deposited in the LORD's temple, the priest Hilkiah found the book of the law of the LORD written by the hand of Moses. **15** Consequently, Hilkiah told the court secretary Shaphan, "I have found the book of the law in the LORD's temple," and he gave the book to Shaphan ... **18** Then the court secretary Shaphan told the king, "The priest Hilkiah gave me a book," and Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king. **19** When the king heard the words of the law, he tore his clothes. **20** Then he commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, the court secretary Shaphan, and the king's servant Asaiah, **21** "Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for those remaining in Israel and Judah, concerning the words of the book that was found. For great is the LORD's wrath that is poured out on us because our ancestors have not kept the word of the LORD in order to do everything written in this book."

Intro Options

Main Point:
True repentance leads to worship and obedience.

Option 1

Ask your students to make guides explaining salvation to an unbeliever, noting specifically what the Bible means in reference to salvation and how one is saved/justified before God. These guides can take one of three options: a skit (pretend it will be recorded and put on YouTube); a poster (pretend it will be put around town); or a flyer (pretend it will be put out at restaurants or hotels). They can work solo or in groups. Whatever medium they choose, they should produce a quick view/read product that will allow others to come to Jesus. Give them time to prepare their productions, and then let them show them. Talk about what common elements you saw in them (hopefully faith!). How many of them talked about repentance, whether they used the actual word or not? Specifically where in the skits/posters/flyers did repentance show up? If it didn't show up, where should it appear? Point out that personal repentance is something that can't be overlooked when talking about our relationship with God.

Option 2

Brainstorm with your students a list of sins. The more specific the better. For example: "stealing $5 from your parents' wallet," "taking the trash out in a sulky manner," etc. Come up with maybe 12-20 examples.

Break your students into small groups. Assign each group one of the specific sins. Their job is now to produce a skit or a drawing that would show what repentance from that specific sin would be. Give them some time to prepare the skits/drawings and then let them show them.

Talk about what they showed. Was repentance merely apologizing for the act? If not, what else did it involve? In today's lesson, you'll see what biblical repentance is as modeled in the life of Josiah. As the lesson unfolds, make as many connections back to their productions as you can.

TEACHING PLAN

Read 2 Chronicles 34:1-7.

Even from a young age, King Josiah served as a godly leader to his people and made tremendous reforms for his land. Take a look at three factors that led to his reforms:

Josiah's Age: God used the young son of an evil king, Amon, to bring about great change for His people. Josiah was only sixteen when he committed his way to the Lord, and twenty when he started implementing reform in his territory. God can call people of any age, young or old, to repentance and use them for His Kingdom.

- **Who are some examples throughout history of young people making a positive impact on their culture?**

Josiah's History: Josiah wasn't raised with the example of a repentant father. He was the son and grandson of terrible kings who bent their knees to false gods. So more than likely, Josiah's first religion was one of idolatry. As with Josiah, we must recognize that our history and our past don't determine our future; repentance and living by faith do.

Josiah's Community: Josiah's first responsibility was for his own repentance. Second, as king, he led his people in repentance, first by example and then by action. He couldn't force a heart change in his community, but he could do as much as possible through his influence to turn them from idols and toward the Lord. We don't have a kingdom to rule, but we do have a community of people we can influence through our faithful words and actions.

- **How has someone else's example of personal repentance and faith challenged you in your own life?**

Read 2 Chronicles 34:8-11.

- **Why do you think Josiah saw the restoration of the temple as a worthy task?**

Josiah, 26 years old and in his eighteenth year of ruling over Judah, set his heart on repairing the temple of God. The next step on his mission to weed out all idolatry and evil from his kingdom required God's temple coming to life once again.

If you go to modern-day Israel, there is no temple on the landscape, only a retaining wall. Instead, you see the Dome of the Rock, a Muslim shrine. It is exquisite in size and design, but the temple built by Solomon would have superseded it.

The Bible describes Solomon's temple building as 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high (1 Kings 6:2). Its interior design would rival some of our finest modern-day professional buildings. The Lord's eye for detail was keen, and Solomon's direction and resources matched this vision. The same could be said of Josiah as he led his people to repair this ornate temple for the Lord.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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2 Chronicles 34

1-2. Josiah had a great opportunity to honor God over the large territory given to him. He easily could have been overwhelmed, but instead, we see him make a complete assault on the evil he saw within his sphere of influence. He tore down the altars of Baal, ripped apart the Asherah poles, executed the priests to these false gods, and defiled their altars (2 Kings 23:16,20). Josiah waged war against the evil in his kingdom because he was humble and repentant before God. Lasting reform only comes from true repentance.

3. According to 34:3, Josiah began his reform initiatives at age twenty, while 2 Kings 22:3 indicates the reform coincides with the finding of the law scroll when he was twenty-six years old. The age of twenty was the age of majority in Hebrew culture and, more than coincidentally for the Chronicler, the age when the Levite began his service to Yahweh (Num 1:3; 1 Chron. 23:24). The decline of the Assyrian empire after the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 BC afforded Judah an opportunity to reassert its own political and religious agenda after languishing as a vassal state since the time of King Ahaz. There is a growing consensus among scholars that Josiah's reform movement predates the finding of the book of Law by Hilkiah the priest. It seems we can speak of Josiah's early reforms prior to the discovery of the law scroll in 622 BC and his later reforms with the temple renovation and eradication of false worship centers.[1]

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 72, DDG)

Repentance

Repentance is a response to God's gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine sorrow for one's sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one's sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God's work of regeneration; in other words, the human side of our conversion.

TEACHING PLAN

Josiah's faith and pursuit of God became contagious as a result of having experienced repentance and the love of God, which fueled his passion for God's glory. Josiah enlisted a team of people to restore worship at the temple: Shaphan, Maaseiah, Joah, Hilkiah, Levites, doorkeepers, carpenters, builders, and more. His calling overflowed to others and got them involved in the good work he was doing. This was always the purpose of God's kings—to lead their people in worship and obedience to the Lord their God.

The same could (and should) be said about us today in working for the kingdom of God. N. T. Wright says, "What you do with your body in the present matters because God has a great future in store for it … What you do in the present—by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself—will last into God's future. These activities are not simply ways of making the present life a little less beastly, a little more bearable, until the day when we leave it behind altogether (as the hymn so mistakenly puts it…). They are part of what we may call building for God's kingdom."[2]

Read 2 Chronicles 34:14-15,18-21.

The book of the Law had fallen so far from the minds of the people during Manasseh's and Amon's evil reigns that it had slipped between the cracks, perhaps literally. But when it was found, its power became evident once again. When the book was read to King Josiah, he tore his clothes because the words cut through him like a sharp sword. Josiah experienced God's power and holiness as they jumped off the pages of Hilkiah's discovery. And that same power and holiness can be experienced every time we open our Bibles today.

- **When has God's Word overwhelmed you with personal conviction and a greater sense of God's holiness?**
- **If God's Word is sharper than a sword and able to communicate God's power and holiness, then why do we treat it as something as optional in the Christian life?**

Josiah was terrified upon hearing God's word in the Law because he understood the wrath of God against sin and disobedience (2 Chron. 34:21). Fear of judgment is a healthy fear to have, after all. However, around six centuries later, the very embodiment of the Word of God would be sent to earth, not to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:17).

Jesus—the Word (John 1:1,14)—is the creator of all. He is the sustainer of all life. He is the light to all of humanity that the darkness of this world cannot overcome. Josiah feared God's wrath for his people's disobedience and repented. The power behind the word of God's law that created such an overwhelming reaction in Josiah put on skin and became a Man who obeyed God's law perfectly.

Jesus came to die on a cross so God's wrath would fall on Him and His repentant people would be saved. This grace is available to every believer, every day. Josiah would be in awe of the Word made flesh. May we find ourselves in awe too. And let us proclaim to the world the great grace of our God in Jesus Christ.

COMMENTARY

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2 Chronicles 34

21. Josiah's lack of knowledge about the book of the Law is a mystery, as his ancestors had relied on the teaching of this book during their own reigns.

- David organized the temple activities according to "everything that was written in the law of the LORD" (1 Chron. 16:40).
- Jehoshaphat sent out officials with "the book of the LORD's instructions" to teach his people (2 Chron. 17:7-9).
- Amaziah did not put the children of his enemies to death because he obeyed what was "written in the law, in the book of Moses" (2 Chron. 25:4).
- Hezekiah made sure the temple ceremonies were conducted according to "the law of the LORD" (2 Chron. 31:3).

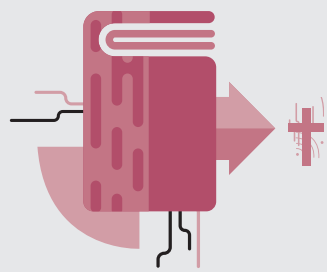
The puzzling question for biblical scholars has been the identity of this book. We can only speculate as to why the law scroll disappeared from the collection of Hebrew religious documents. Was it suppressed, or lost, or hidden? Presumably the scroll fell out of the circulation because of the need to hide it for the sake of preservation at the threat of military invasion (e.g., the Assyrian campaign against Hezekiah); or else it was censored by rulers and/or concealed by the priests during one of the lapses of Israel into religious apostasy (e.g., the reigns of Athaliah, Ahaz, Amon, Manasseh).[3]

Activity

If you did Intro Option 2, go back to the list of specific sins your group made up. If you didn't do Intro Option 2, take some time and brainstorm a list of specific sins your students might struggle with: cheating on schoolwork, not giving their best in athletic practice, being apathetic in their prayer lives. Break your students into pairs; assign each pair one of the specific sins from your list. Next, have the groups count off by threes; assign all the ones the idea that repentance involves destroying idols; assign all the twos the idea that repentance involves restoring worship; assign all the threes the idea that repentance involves obeying the Word of God. The students should create a skit or drawing in which someone repents of the particular sin they were assigned; in the course of the drawing or skit, students should show, as clearly as they can, their particular point happening. For example, a group with the sin of "trolling others' posts online" and the idea that repentance involves restoring worship might make a skit where the person, instead of trolling posts, says he wants to honor God with his social media and so comments in a way that points others to Jesus. Give them some time to prep the skits/drawings and then to show them. Debrief by pointing out the good examples.

(p. 74, DDG) Christ Connection

Josiah was a good king whom God used to lead the people back to Him, but he was not the perfect king that the people needed. Jesus is the righteous King of kings who brings us to God by paying our sin penalty and giving us His righteousness.



GOD RECEIVES THE PEOPLE'S REPENTANCE

2 Chronicles 34:1–11, 14–15, 18–21

GOD RECEIVES THE PEOPLE'S REPENTANCE

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JESUS CONNECTION

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LIFEWISE QUALITY

RESPONSIBILITY – Taking ownership of my choices and behavior, including the consequences.

HEAD

What steps did Josiah take to get rid of idol worship in Judah?

God's law had not been read or taught for many years. Where did the priests find it? What was Josiah's response when he heard God's Word?

HEART

Josiah's father and grandfather had not worshiped God. But Josiah chose to follow Him and do the right thing. Do you think everyone agreed with his changes?

Why is it hard to follow God by yourself? Why would having family, friends or church members who also follow God help you do the right thing?

HANDS

We cannot force people to do the right thing, whether that means following God or making good choices or stopping a harmful behavior. But we all have influence. What are some practical ways you can use your words and actions to positively influence those in your circle to follow God and live life His way?